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ABSTRACT

This paper explores some definitions of school-based budgeting and other forms of decentralization, attempts to determine the extent of their adoption, develops some indications of decentralization results, and provides suggestions for further research directions. The paper addresses (1) how often decentralization involving a change in resource allocation procedures is mentioned as a possible response to demand for change in educational systems; (2) the nature of the demand for changes in school system organization; (3) whether decentralization reported in the literature shifts resource allocation procedures toward the school level; and (4) whether decentralization produces improvements in efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. The study reviews 14 articles published between 1980-88. Each article was analyzed to elicit answers to the research questions, and the results were tabulated according to sample size, attitude toward decentralization, nature of demand for organizational change, classification of the type of decentralization, and the results of the innovation adopted. Decentralization appears to be a positive innovation for addressing the demands for organizational change in school systems. Further research into the definition of decentralization and the development of a model of decentralization is required. More concrete, reportable research data are needed, in addition to more school-level studies of decentralization effects, including their impact on the budgeting process in school systems. (28 references) (MLH)

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EFFICIENCY, EFFECTIVENESS AND THE DECENTRALIZATION OF LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS

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EFFICIENCY, EFFECTIVENESS AND THE DECENTRALIZATION OF LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS

Abstract

This paper explores some definitions of school-based budgeting and other forms of decentralization, attempts to determine the extent of their adoption, develops some indications of results of decentralization and provides suggestions for directions for further research.

Four questions are addressed in the paper, namely: 1) How often is decentralization involving a change in resource allocation procedures mentioned as a possibility for addressing the demand for change in educational systems?; 2) What is the nature of the demand on school systems for organizational change?; 3) Does decentralization reported in the literature result in changes in resource allocation procedures toward the school level?; 4) Does decentralization result in improvements in terms of efficiency, effectiveness and accountability?

Fourteen articles dating from 1980-1988 are reviewed after a manual search for the library at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, an ERIC search and personal knowledge of the authors.

Each article was analyzed to elicit answers to the research questions and the results reported in tabular form including; a description of the nature of the study including sample size, attitude toward decentralization, nature of demand for organizational change, classification of the type of decentralization and the results of the innovation adopted.

Decentralization is reported to be a positive innovation for addressing the demands for organizational change in local school systems. Further research into the definition of decentralization and the development of a model of decentralization is required. More concrete, reportable data in research projects is required in addition to more school level studies of the effects of decentralization, including their impact on the budgeting process in school systems.

EFFICIENCY, EFFECTIVENESS AND THE DECENTRALIZATION OF LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEMS

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this review is to survey the literature on decentralization to identify some definitions of decentralization, attempt to determine the extent of adoption of this innovation, develop some indications of results of decentralization and provide direction for further research into the area. The review employs the guidelines conceptualized by Cooper (1982) in that it attempts to apply scientific methodology to examine the literature in a more rigorous manner.

Daily exigencies of school needs and growing dissatisfaction with an inflexible centralized system have resulted in growing attention to the question of how administrative practices can be changed to make schools more effective. This trend, evident in educational systems around the world (Caldwell, 1987), has been slow to appear in most of Canada, but has been the subject of research in British Columbia and Alberta (Brown, 1987; Alexandruk, 1986). A key thesis behind the innovation is that management reform, including an increased responsibility for the management of resources at the school level (Coopers and Lybrand, 1988), can result in greater school effectiveness and increased school system efficiency.

If school-based management (SBM) was as demonstrably effective as its advocates claim, one would expect it would be more widespread. Usually overlooked in the literature are the external and internal conditions that may affect its introduction and success. External factors include demographic forces, political ideologies, technological developments, religious differences, ethnocultural heterogeneity, and economic growth/decline. These forces affect the demands placed upon schools and school systems by affecting the size and nature of their clientele: parents and children. Demand, in turn, affects the school and school system, including the internal political, technological and organizational forms that are used.

The demand for more responsive schools may lead to innovations such as school based management. Goodlad (1984) has indicated that both parents and professional educators (namely teachers and principals) favour greater decentralization with a shift of power to more local actors. This trend may signal the beginnings of an environmental press for greater decentralization which could result in a significant change in the form of governance in education at the local level.

While arguments over centralization and decentralization are perennial features of the organization literature, the debate over SBM seems more fundamental in that it is linked to the very process of governing education. When policy analysts such as Michael Kirst of Stanford University asks, Who Should Control Our Schools? (1988), the question strikes at the roots of the issue of social vs. private control over education and schools. Indeed, Pring (1988) posits that a considerable degree of privatisation already exists in school systems today and suggests that an increase in the private (market) element of school systems would lead to more effective schools.

Yet, turning education over to private interests is, in fact, tantamount to giving it to social groups that have the entrepreneurial resources necessary to organize schools (Lawton, 1987; James, 1987). The Canadian Union of Public Employees suggestion that SBM is tantamount to "franchising" education may be close to the mark; that is, SBM is a political/organizational response of publicly funded school systems to instill in themselves a greater degree of market sensitivity (including "market segmentation") in order to ward off the countervailing threat of privatization. This interpretation is most evident in the writings on Victoria, Australia, where the public and private sectors have come into most direct confrontation (Coopers and Lybrand, 1988).

This review will attempt to identify the nature and strength of the environmental press, including the demand for increased quality and choice in education, and the response, in terms of greater decentralization, of education systems. True decentralization may be measured in terms of the changes in the resource allocation procedures from a central authority to the local/school level (Brown, 1987). Data are required to measure the results of decentralization schemes in terms of the initial demands that prompted organizational change.

DEFINITIONS

Decentralization can be described in a number of ways. Fantini and Gittell (1973) and others suggest that a key component of decentralization is increased parental involvement in decision-making at the local school level. On the other hand, some jurisdictions view decentralization as a movement of supervisory personnel into field offices to facilitate closer supervision (Metropolitan Separate School Board, 1988). It would appear that there are at least two broad types of decentralization then; decentralization involving a transfer of power toward the school site; and decentralization involving a transfer of central office personnel to intermediate locations such as regional offices or school sites.

Brown (1987) defines school-based management as "the delegation of authority to make some of the budgetary decisions from the central office to the school". This definition appears to be consistent with the more far-reaching proposals in the Coopers and Lybrand Report (1988) that signals a meaningful decentralization of decision-making to a local level. One purpose of this review will be to ascertain the extent to which the definition of decentralization includes the shift of the decision-making locus to the school level.

QUESTIONS

Questions addressed by this review include:

1. How often is decentralization involving a change in resource allocation procedures mentioned as a possibility for addressing the demand for change in education systems?

This is an important question in that a change in resource allocation often signals a meaningful change in the decision-making process. If decentralization involved changing the locus of decision-making toward the local school level, schools may become more

responsive to student and parent needs and thereby more effective.

In this review, decentralization will be treated as the dependent variable. Altschuler (cited in Brown, 1987) conceptualizes decentralization as either; 1) political, involving increasing input into decision-making from the school community, or 2) bureaucratic, implying a transfer of administrative decision-making from one level in a hierarchy to lower levels. This review will attempt to focus on the bureaucratic type of decentralization, with the added condition that decentralization should involve a transfer of power to allocate resources to the school level. In this sense we are looking for examples of school-based management (SBM) as defined by Brown (1987).

Caldwell (1987) suggests that there are certain uniform services that could be best provided by a centralized decision-making body and other diverse needs that would best be served by decentralization. Examples given by Caldwell include centralized provision of support services such as transportation and decentralized provision of instructional programs to meet diverse student needs.

A corollary question which will be addressed in the review is:

1. a) What is the nature of the decentralization reported?

We will attempt to identify the degree to which authority is transferred to the local school level where it might be used to meet student needs more effectively.

2. What is the nature of the demand on school systems for organizational change?

Before SBM can be evaluated as an innovation designed to improve education, it is necessary to identify the nature of the demands for change. The nature of the demand in this review will be treated as the antecedent variable which could stimulate the move towards decentralization. Five major categories of demand may be cited as potential causes of the decentralization movement; quality, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and equity.

Guthrie (1986) suggests that indicators of academic quality, such as test scores, had declined in the U.S. during the 1960's and 70's prompting what Doyle (1987) terms the excellence movement in education. Effectiveness is an issue that the public appears to be concerned with (Cuban, 1984) and much research has been conducted on the characteristics of effective schools. Brown (1987) identifies accountability and efficiency as two major themes in the decentralization issue. Accountability is being demanded by the public (Alexandruk, 1986) and efficiency appears to be a perennial public concern. Lawton (1987) identifies equity as "the paramount issue that attracts public notice and support", a notion further developed by Caldwell (1987).

3. Does decentralization reported in the literature result in changes in resource allocation procedures toward the school level?

It is critical to determine if a true change in decision-making has occurred as a result of decentralization. Decentralization will be treated as the dependent variable in this review. Lawton (1987) describes a budget as "a political document that mirrors the

decisions that have been taken on who gets what." He goes on to develop a typology of school budgeting which has five hierarchical levels: 1) administrative determination at the board level; 2) administrative determination at the school level; 3) budgeting by school council; 4) participative budgeting by school staff; 5) joint community and school budgeting (Lawton, 1987). For the purposes of this review, resource allocation procedures will be measured by attempting to locate reported decentralization by placing it in Lawton's typology.

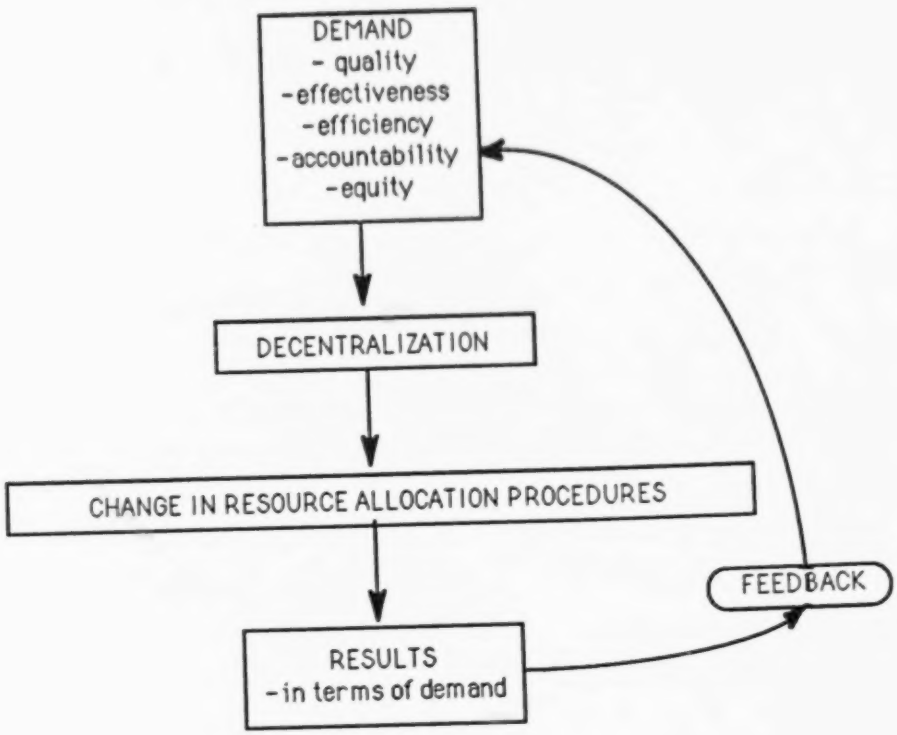
4. Does decentralization result in improvements in terms of the original demands for organizational change?

This review will attempt to look at results of decentralization reported in the literature as a form of feedback to the original stimulus for change. Indeed, we will attempt to determine if decentralization is a viable innovation to meet the demands for change.

A MODEL

The demand for change in educational systems and subsequent reaction to that demand may be conceptualized as in Figure 1 following:

FIGURE 1



METHODOLOGY

The studies in this review were initially identified by; a manual search of the libraries at OISE and Brock University; an ERIC search; bibliographic follow-up and personal knowledge of the authors.

The date range of the ERIC search was from January 1983 to June 1988 using the descriptors school-based management, school-based budgeting and local school management. This technique yielded 138 abstracts, of which 31 were more closely analyzed as they appeared to deal with decentralization of decision making to the school level.

The criteria for selection of articles to be included in the review were that they; a) dealt with decentralization of decision-making toward the school level, b) the level of adoption of decentralization was indicated and c) some indication of results was mentioned.

The nature of articles reviewed and a preliminary presentation of results is summarized in Table 1 following. Some cautionary notes regarding the sources are in order prior to a discussion of results.

The small number of articles reviewed (n=14) limits the generalizability of the findings; however, an attempt was made to keep articles current (1980 on). Some of the articles discussed decentralization in the same jurisdiction, particularly Alberta, further limiting generalizability.

Four of the empirical studies (Brown, 1987; Chapman and Boyd, 1986; Kowalski, 1980 and Murphy et al., 1987) provided sufficient detail as to methodology employed to establish a reasonable degree of confidence in results reported. The remaining five empirical studies were characterized by; no data reported (Alexandruk, 1986; Spear, 1983), a small sample (Lindelow, 1981), questionable statistical techniques (Davidson and Montgomery, 1985) and having an instructional focus rather than resource allocation (David and Peterson, 1984).

Given the limitations mentioned above, the findings must be treated with caution. However, this review does identify some significant trends which deserve further rigorous research.

TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF STUDIES REVIEWED

STUDY	DECENTRALIZATION REPORTED	DEMAND VARIABLE	STAGE IN LAWTON TYPOLOGY	RESULTS OF DECENT.
Alexandruk 1986 Alberta Empirical/survey n=1	Yes	All (equity implied)	4	Positive
Brown 1987 Alberta/BC Empirical/survey n=33	Yes	All (quality implied)	2	Positive
Caldwell 1987 US/Can/UK/Aust. Descriptive	Yes	effectiveness efficiency accountability equity	US 2 Can 2 UK 5 Aust 5	US Neutral CAN Positive UK Positive Aust Positive
Casner-Lotto 1988 US Descriptive	Partial	quality	4	Positive
Chapman&Boyd 1986 Australia Empirical/interview n=60	Yes	quality effectiveness accountability equity	4	Positive
David&Peterson 1984 US Empirical/interview n=32	Partial	quality effectiveness accountability equity	2&5	Positive
Davidson& Montgomery 1985 US Empirical&Descriptive n=51-55	Yes	quality effectiveness	4	Positive

TABLE 1 - continued

STUDY	DECENTRALIZATION REPORTED	DEMAND VARIABLE	STAGE IN LAWTON TYPOLOGY	RESULTS OF DECENT.
Grobe et al. 1984 US Descriptive	Yes	quality accountability	2	Neutral
Humphrey&Thomas 1983-86 UK Descriptive	Yes	efficiency	2	Positive
Kowalski 1980 US Emprical/survey n=100	No	efficiency equity	0	Positive
Lindelow 1981 US Empirical/interview n=6	Yes	efficiency equity	4	Positive
Morgan 1983 US Descriptive	Partial	quality effectiveness (both implied)	5	Positive
Murphy et al. 1987 US Empirical/interview n=12	No	effectiveness	1	Negative
Spear 1983 US Empirical/interview no data reported	Yes	All (effectiveness & accountability implied)	4	Positive

Explanatory Note: Studies are identified by; author(s), date, location, nature of study, sample size (if any).

DISCUSSION

1. How often is decentralization involving a change in resource allocation procedures mentioned as a possibility for addressing the demand for change in education systems?

1. a) What is the nature of the decentralization reported?

Decentralization, involving the transfer of power to allocate resources to the school level, is evident in 9 of the 14 studies as an innovation addressing the demand for change in education systems. It is partially evident 3 times, and not evident as an innovation twice. This is not a surprising result given that the focus of this review was decentralization. Kowalski (1980) surveys principals' attitudes toward the concept of decentralization and Murphy et al. (1987) examine control in effective school districts, accounting for the two citations where decentralization was not present.

Table 2 below illustrates the level of decentralization reported according to Lawton's (1987) typology.

TABLE 2

LEVEL OF DECENTRALIZATION

	LEVEL	NUMBER OF CITATIONS
Bureaucratic	1	1
	2	6
	3	0
Political	4	6
	5	4

Note: Caldwell (1987) reports on 4 jurisdictions with differing levels of decentralization; results are reported separately accounting for the total of 17 above rather than the 14 studies reviewed.

In 6 out of 17 studies, it appears that decentralization occurred to the extent that budgeting is determined at the school level. More significantly, in 10 out of 17 studies participative budgeting occurred at the school level. A note of caution is in order in that the assignment of studies to a specific level on Lawton's typology was subjective and depended on an interpretation of the information presented in the literature. It is difficult to determine how much of a school's budget is allocated to the school where decision-making by local actors may take place.

Two jurisdictions, Edmonton, Alberta, and Solihull, England, allocate 90% of the school's budget as a lump sum (Brown, 1987; Humphrey and Thomas, 1986), allowing for an

accurate measure of the extent of decentralization as we have defined it. There is a need to acquire more concrete information of this type on budget allocations to more accurately determine the extent of decentralization as we have defined it. In addition, school level information is required to determine if school-based management is taking place in the school.

Two studies (David and Peterson, 1984; Lindelow, 1981) suggest that decentralization should have an instructional/curricular focus. Indeed, Caldwell (1987) defines resources to include curriculum, instruction, authority to make decisions, materiel, personnel, time and money. Taken in this context, the extent of decentralization may be even broader than this literature review indicates, since curricular decentralization was not included in the original search process. Further research is required to more accurately and objectively define decentralization and to measure the extent of its use in school systems.

2. What is the nature of the demand on school systems for organizational change?

The nature of the demand for organizational change can be reported with a considerable degree of confidence, according to the number of times demand variables are mentioned in each study. Table 3 below illustrates the results. The variable mentions are counted as an indication of the nature of the demand for organizational change reported in studies of decentralization.

TABLE 3

DEMAND FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

VARIABLE	MENTIONS		
	EMPIRICAL STUDIES	DESCRIPTIVE STUDIES	TOTAL
Quality	6	3	9
Effectiveness	7	2	9
Efficiency	5	3	8
Accountability	5	2	7
Equity	7	1	8

The even distribution of demands in both the empirical and descriptive studies suggests that decentralization is an innovation which attempts to meet the demand variables identified in the model.(Figure 1). As a greater number of studies are reviewed, the confidence with which decentralization can be viewed as a viable innovation to meet the demands will likely increase. Some comments on the nature of demands for change are appropriate.

Caldwell (1987) cites the National Association of Secondary School Principals and the National Education Association as calling for greater decision making at the school level in order to improve the quality of education, one of the few studies to make such a direct link between demands on the education system and decentralization as a means to meet the demand. In the other studies, improving the quality of education is cited, however, decentralization is not directly described as an innovation to meet that objective. Humphrey and Thomas (1986) suggest that managerial decisions need to be tested in terms of their effects on learning. Innovations of all types, including decentralization, could well benefit from this type of testing.

Efficiency is seen as either maintaining the same output using fewer resources or increasing the output with the same level of resources (Humphrey and Thomas, 1986). Efficiency appears to be a critical issue in times of scarce resources.

Fantini and Gittell (1973) suggested that accountability to the public and their involvement in educational matters at the school level was a significant issue. Spear (1983) posits that recent legislation in the U.S. has stimulated the demand for greater accountability, and Casner-Lotto (1988) reports greater parental involvement in schools. Spear (1983) also suggests that the initiative for more accountability has come from legislative action at the federal level in the United States. Five studies (Brown, 1987; Caldwell, 1987; Humphrey and Thomas, 1983; Lindelow, 1981; Casner-Lotto, 1988) identify the superintendent as the key actor in pressing for organizational change towards decentralization. This is a significant shift from the "grass-roots" demand suggested by Fantini and is a topic worthy of further research.

Equity is often expressed as increasing choice in education systems so that the needs of students can be more closely matched with programme (Brown, 1987; Caldwell, 1987; Humphrey and Thomas, 1983; Lindelow, 1981).

There is not a clear direct relationship between the demand for change in education and decentralization. Future research needs to examine the process leading to decentralization to determine what demands were being addressed and measure the success of the innovation against those demands. In other words, the research needs to establish if a link exists between the demands for change and decentralization as a specific innovation to meet those demands.

3. Does decentralization reported in the literature result in changes in resource allocation procedures toward the school level?

Given the cautionary note regarding the assignment of studies on Lawton's typology, it would appear that decentralization does result in changes in resource allocation procedures toward the school level. More concrete information on the budgeting process is required, particularly in terms of percentage of lump-sum budgets allocated to schools before and after decentralization efforts. Humphrey and Thomas (1983) suggest that some Headmasters are reluctant to engage in participative decision-making with their staffs. School-level surveys involving teachers are therefore required to more accurately determine the actual level of involvement in decision-making.

4. Does decentralization result in improvement in terms of the original demands for organizational change?

Decentralization, in its various forms, is reported to have been a positive innovation in 14 of the 17 studies (treating Caldwell, 1987, as 4 studies). This result must be treated with caution given the lack of a clear, direct relationship between demand and decentralization as discussed earlier. Nonetheless, reported results are positive.

Casner-Lotto (1988) reports that test scores increased in Hammond, Indiana after the introduction of a School Improvement Process. Davidson and Montgomery (1985) also report test scores increased as a result of a partial decentralization scheme, although their use of mean scores should be treated with caution due to an apparent lack of control variables. Brown (1987) reports parental satisfaction increased after decentralization, and Alexandruk (1986) reports that school staff are moderately satisfied with the innovation. These results suggest improvements in quality and effectiveness, as measured by test scores and satisfaction levels, are possible with decentralization.

Edmonton has established a series of achievement tests to be implemented in the system (Caldwell, 1987) and these tests could provide valuable data for measuring results. An interesting research project might involve comparing the level of implementation of decentralization in a school with results as measured by tests.

In terms of efficiency, there are a few key reports indicating decentralization does meet this demand. Humphrey and Thomas (1986) report that 10 schools in Solihull underspent by £ 219,000 as of 31 March, 1986. Casner-Lotto (1988) reports that the deficit in Hammond, Indiana was reduced considerably after implementation of the School Improvement Process. These reports suggest decentralization can be a significant factor in improving efficiency. If we recall Humphrey and Thomas' (1983) comment that efficiency can be viewed as either maintaining output with fewer resources or increasing output with the same level of resources, the potential for decentralization as a valuable innovation in education is great. More data on costs per pupil will be required to begin to measure the efficiency of decentralization.

Chapman and Boyd (1986) report that principals feel that they are more visible as a result of decentralization, due to the involvement of school councils in decision-making. Humphrey and Thomas (1983) suggest that autonomy increases accountability in terms of making budget reports more meaningful. The survey of parents in Edmonton (Brown, 1987) instituted along with decentralization certainly increases accountability in that system.

Brown (1987) suggests that equity is improved through decentralization, although greater research seems to be needed to substantiate that claim.

CONCLUSIONS

There appears to be a general lack of agreement as to what decentralization actually is; however, it appears that movement of the power to allocate resources closer to the school level is a paramount concern. Further research is required to clarify the definition of decentralization and develop some common measures of the extent of decentralization. Perhaps the best place to conduct this type of research would be in jurisdictions such as Solihull and Edmonton, where there appears to be a meaningful type of decentralization as defined above.

Adoption levels are vague, partially due to a lack of concrete data on the percentage of budget allocated on a lump sum basis to schools. Further complicating the adoption issue is the question of implementation of an innovation at the school level. Much of the literature surveyed reported results of surveys at levels above the school. School level surveys are required to more accurately measure the extent and implementation of decentralization.

Perhaps the most significant affirmations of decentralization as a viable innovation come from Solihull (Humphrey and Thomas, 1986) and Edmonton (Alexandruk, 1986), where initial pilot projects have been expanded and made permanent. Although we may be missing some details in the literature, we assume that responsible officials in the above mentioned jurisdictions have made a reasonable assessment of the innovation before approving it as a permanent feature.

Decentralization appears to address many demands for change in educational systems. We need more rigorous research on decentralization using concrete, reportable data, and an attempt to establish the relationship between a demand for change, decentralization and the results of this particular innovation.

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